

**Men:** To loosen up on Fridays, get creative with sweaters, vests, or even suspenders, and you can pair them with slim ties.



**Men:** A black suit, a white shirt paired with a red tie and a pocket square can never go wrong for the business look.



**Women:** If you're dead set on wearing jeans and T-shirt, make sure it fits you well. Throw on a pair of wedges if you like.

# FORMAL OR CASUAL?



## UNDERSTANDING OFFICE DRESS CODES

By **JOSHUA DESMOND**  
editor@leaderonomics.com

**R**EMEMBER that interview when your prospective employer asked if you had any questions about the job? One of my favourites has always been, "What's the dress code?"

While to some of you, this seems hardly an important question to ask; to me, it is.

Why? Aside from creating positive first impressions, it helps with self-confidence. Expressing my individuality helped me stand out and opened more doors for me.

When you look good, you feel good. So dressing to impress while expressing your individuality may be the key to building confidence while making lasting impressions.

Many of you have come a long way and embraced fashion and style at the workplace. Some of you have learnt how to push the envelope, which is why this is not for you.

Typical behaviour sees most of us trudging through, accepting dress codes, and somehow looking either like a 1980s version of yourself or the walking dead, simply because you didn't know how to follow dress codes and still look like you.

### FASHION FAUX PAS

- You tried pairing a cowboy belt buckle with your business attire.
- You grew that beard but forgot the importance of grooming it regularly.
- You bought that trendy top, only to realise it was cleavage overload at the workplace.

Before you throw in the towel, here are some suggestions to guide you to the right path.

### DOWN TO BUSINESS

Guys, if you think your only option is anything between a black blazer, black slacks, that tie your dad passed on to you, and black shoes from graduation, you are wrong. Spice it up a little.

If you're feeling motivated for that pitch in the morning, put on a black suit, a white shirt paired with a red tie and a white pocket square. Kick things up a notch with a lapel pin.

These days, there are so many cool designs to suit your personality. Now, you've gone from Boring Dave to Dashing Dave.

**Tip:** Unbutton your blazer when you sit.

Ladies, don't just stick to those black, grey or brown skirts and pantsuits. Change that boring white blouse to a blue chiffon top, tucked into a pencil skirt paired with navy blue peep-toe shoes you've been dying to wear to work.

If your workplace has a little more leeway, go for a biker jacket instead of a blazer. Better yet, play around with colours. I'm not saying get a yellow blazer but there are other dark-coloured ones aside from black and grey.

■ *Joshua Desmond is a recording artist and an award-winning adman. Between music and work, he moonlights as a freelance image consultant and stylist. He was one of the Top 5 in Esquire Malaysia's Best Dressed Real Man in 2014. He believes style does not require a huge bank account, just the right amount of inspiration and resourcefulness. To engage with us for more style tips, e-mail training@leaderonomics.com.*



**Women:** For a casual look, match a pair of slim fit denims with a nice oxford shirt and a pair of sneakers. Add accessories for a touch of sophistication.

### KEEPING THINGS CASUAL

If you're going for the business casual look, don't just stick to the long sleeve shirt, tie and slacks combo. First off, get proper fitting pants. Get them in black, navy blue and grey. These will be your Monday–Thursday pants.

Get a few light-coloured work shirts and slim ties to go with them. Be a little more creative by trying on sweaters in different colours, and vests or even suspenders.

**Tip:** No shirts with cufflinks if you're not suiting up! That's just bad taste.

Ladies, same for you. Get a few skirts and pants in different colours and pair them with colourful tops and a pair of flats or heels of your choice. No more boring striped shirts.

And remember, accessorise—rings, earrings, necklaces. Don't just buy them, use them!

### LOOSEN UP, IT'S FRIDAY!

That's when we bid farewell to the weight of the formal suits for the weekend and get ready for a "hair down" weekend. This doesn't mean you can roll in to work in what you woke up in. Don't lose the spirit just because it's casual Friday. Dressing down doesn't mean spirits down.

Put on a pair of slim fit denim, nice leather boots and a plain white shirt with the sleeves folded and an accessory or two around the neck and wrists for that rock star vibe.

Alternatively, go for a pair of khakis, boat shoes and a nice oxford shirt buttoned all the way up with a nice watch on the wrist.

If you insist on that jeans and T-shirt look, make sure you've got the staple blue and black jeans and they must fit well because you know, baggy jeans belong in the 90s. Get a nice pair of sneakers to complete the look. Please don't wear your badminton or running shoes!

Ladies, the options are endless—skinny jeans, flared skirts, maxi dresses. Don't just stick to one casual Friday look. Experiment and have fun! Bring out the spiked sandals, the floral wedges, curl up your hair, or anything that allows you to be you.

### PARTING THOUGHTS

Remember, if something looks good on your favourite celebrity, it does not mean it will look good on you. Do your research.

Look for inspiration and find looks that complement your personality, physique and style. If you don't use Pinterest, now is a good time to start. A wealth of ideas are at your fingertips.

The goal here is not to make you into something you're not. It's to help you stand out while being comfortable in your own way.

Contrary to popular belief, workplace fashion doesn't have to be painful. Done right, even the simplest outfits can make heads turn.

